

September 17, 2012

The Honorable Governor Quinn
Attn: Health Care Reform Implementation Council
207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706

**RE: Inclusion of Acupuncture and Licensed Acupuncturist services
under Illinois' EHB Benchmark Plan**

Honorable Governor Quinn:

We as Illinois citizens and representatives of the practicing acupuncture community petition your Health Care Reform Implementation Council to include Acupuncture and visits to Licensed Acupuncturists in Illinois' Essential Health Benefits (EHB) Benchmark plan, to be enacted under the Affordable Care Act.

Acupuncture and Licensed Acupuncturist services immediately fall under the following of the ten categories of benefits: Ambulatory patient services, maternity and newborn care, mental health and substance use disorder services, rehabilitative and habilitative services, preventive and wellness services and chronic disease management, and pediatric services.

Precedent: Acupuncture is already covered in some plans by some of the largest providers in Illinois, including Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Cigna, and GEHA. Acupuncture is currently offered as a service in major Illinois hospital systems including Northwestern Memorial¹, Northshore University/University of Chicago Systems², St. Joseph's Hospital in the Resurrection Healthcare System³, Rush University for Pediatric care⁴, Loyola University⁵, the University of Illinois⁶, and others. Out of state, California is likely to offer Acupuncture as an essential health benefit⁷; acupuncture is offered by the Cleveland Clinic⁸, Harvard University⁹, and other prestigious institutions. While acupuncture is clearly valued and utilized, most citizens of Illinois still must pay out of pocket for services, and provision of care is limited due to limited reimbursement in general. Inclusion of Acupuncture and Licensed Acupuncturist services as EHB's would level the playing field for all Illinois citizens, not only those with high end insurance plans.

Effectiveness: The number of conditions recognized as suitable for treatment by acupuncture is both vast and long recognized. The World Health Organization has recognized Acupuncture as appropriate for the treatment of hundreds of conditions for years as well.¹⁰¹¹

Cost Effectiveness: The available evidence supports the conclusion that the inclusion of Acupuncture and Licensed Acupuncturist services as EHB's will save money and reduce costs in the Illinois medical system. Acupuncture has been found in numerous studies to be cost-effective, and could save consumers billions of dollars over more costly interventions. A detailed federal report commissioned by the National Institute of Complementary Medicine in Australia concluded, "According to WHO benchmarks, acupuncture as a complement to standard care for relief of chronic non-specific LBP is very cost effective... This finding is in line with international cost

effectiveness studies (Thomas et al 2005 and Witt et al 2006) of acupuncture as a complement to standard care."¹² A recent overview of acupuncture's cost effectiveness, *Economic Evaluation in Acupuncture: Past and Future*, summarizes some of the potential savings benefits.¹³

Safety: Acupuncture is one of the safest medical modalities known when performed by properly trained individuals. A 2001 study published in the prestigious British Medical Journal documents the safety of Acupuncture in detail.^{14,15}

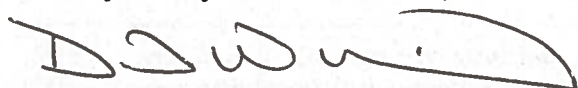
Supports Small and Large Business in Illinois: Illinois has 743 active "Acupuncturist" licenses¹⁶, and three major schools of acupuncture. This represents the employment of hundreds of Illinois citizens, with the potential for future growth. Currently, Licensed Acupuncturists in Illinois are only allowed to bill 4 codes, all related to acupuncture, and hence are shut out of the medical system if acupuncture and their services are not included as EHB's. These practitioners must struggle with out of pocket reimbursements from patients, and are not attractive as medical team members for hospital systems as their services cannot be billed. They also are only able to treat wealthier patients, and cannot provide services to lower income Illinois citizens who equally would benefit from care. This represents a detrimental and discriminatory obstruction to trade in Illinois that is not based on evidence, cost effectiveness, or what is in the best interest of the Illinois consumer, and fosters an environment that kills small business in the State. Current practices still favor distribution of monies towards costly interventions that benefit few individual citizens instead of the far less costly intervention of acupuncture and Licensed Acupuncturist care that could benefit many. Inclusion of Acupuncture and Licensed Acupuncturist services as EHB's would help to remedy this waste, and equalize access.

The Compassionate Choice: Acupuncture is increasingly being found effective for the care of individuals with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and substance use issues. We have few effective tools for the treatment of these conditions using current, mainstream medicine. Our veterans are returning from our wars, and it is common knowledge that their suicide rates and rates of PTSD are skyrocketing.¹⁷ A recent study of the use of acupuncture for PTSD demonstrated that, "Based on GRADE criteria, acupuncture used as an alternative to traditional cognitive behavioral therapy or anti-depressive/mood-altering pharmaceuticals provides equal to superior results in patients' symptom resolution and in extended remission of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder."¹⁸ It is unthinkable irresponsible to not do everything in our power to make this *safe, effective, side-effect free therapy* accessible to our veterans. Inclusion of Acupuncture and Licensed Acupuncturist services as EHB's would be an obvious step in the right direction towards healing our troops.

Cultural Right: Acupuncture as practiced by Licensed Acupuncturists and physicians is valued by the Asian community of Illinois as a cultural treasure. It is the right of citizens to receive health care that is culturally valued, so long as that health care is safe, effective, cost-effective, and well regulated. Acupuncture meets all of these criteria. It is an arbitrary cultural affront to deny the Asian community, as well as the growing community of non-Asian consumers, access to this major medical modality provided by the provider of their choice. Inclusion of Acupuncture and Licensed Acupuncturist services as EHB's is the culturally sensitive solution.

We the undersigned, as representatives of the medical community practicing acupuncture and the lay and supportive communities representing citizens of Illinois, ask you again to please **include Acupuncture and Licensed Acupuncturist services as EHB's in Illinois' Essential Health Benefits (EHB) Benchmark plan.**

Thank you for your consideration,



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